

**Weekly Situation Report**  
**Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS)**  
**April 22, 2003**  
**From: Billy Causey**

**HOT TOPICS AND HEADS UP:**

FKNMS responded to a mass stranding of pilot whales north of Big Pine Key. Response to the 28 whales beached on shoals at the Content Keys was initiated on Friday, April 18<sup>th</sup> with Sanctuary law enforcement officers and biologists responding to the scene. At the direction of NMFS marine mammal specialists and the Florida Keys Marine Mammal Stranding Network, FKNMS mobilized four resource management boats (Team Ocean 2, Team Ocean 3, 17' whaler, and Carolina Skiff) with crew and volunteers in addition to the law enforcement support. FKNMS Team OCEAN program members, led by Robert Keeley, continued supporting on the water rescue efforts over the weekend. On Monday, FKNMS staff again provided boat support to NOAA Fisheries and MARS personnel performing necropsies and in carcass disposal operations.

Staff responding to the stranding event included: Robert Keeley - Team OCEAN; Anne McCarthy, Robert Kamphaus, Alicia Stevenson and Russell Reardon – all FKNMS Lower Region resource management; Rusty Mason, T.J. Pacot and Alex Creedon - FKNMS Lower Region Mooring Buoy; Ben Richards – FKNMS research assistant; Kevin Kirsch and Sean Meehan – Seagrass Damage Assessment Team; Ross and Maryann Harrison – Team OCEAN Volunteers, and numerous other volunteers and agency staff. Of the 28 animals that initially stranded, it was reported that six died on scene, six were euthanized and seven were transported to Mariner's boat basin on Big Pine Key for rehabilitation. Nine were successfully returned to deeper water and presumed in good health. Dead animals appeared to be suffering from anemia and viral disease; results of the necropsies and blood samples taken will give more information on the health of the whales.

On April 22, Billy Causey will participate in the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and Mote Marine Laboratory Earth Day celebration at the Mote Aquarium in Sarasota, Florida. This event will be the kick-off for the Robert Lyn Nelson Sea-to-Shining Sea traveling exhibit.

On April 24, Billy will be at the Harte Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies to speak as the spring Harte Distinguished Lecturer, at Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi, Texas. His topic is: Coastal Ecosystem Linkages – What do Texas and the Florida Keys Have in Common?

The USACE is hosting a public meeting on the Key West Harbor dredging, on 22 April at Banana Bay, in Key West. FKNMS resource specialist Lauri MacLaughlin and LR Manager Fritz Wettstein will represent FKNMS at this meeting.

LR Operations Manager Steve Baumgartner and UR Resource Manager John Halas returned from a two-week trip to Colombia late on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April. Steve and John

worked with officials to start the process of building a mooring buoy program. Assisting the officials with the implementation of the program is tentatively scheduled for a follow-up trip in September.

Alicia Stevenson, Coupon Bight Preserve Manager, joined Brian Lockwood of USFWS in assessing the condition of state properties on Big Pine Key. The assessment and follow-up cleanup are being conducted prior to transferring the lease for the lands to the Big Pine Key National Wildlife Refuge.

John Nazzaro performed a comprehensive review of informational signage in the lower keys. The review was conducted at the request of FKNMS education coordinator Mary Tagliareni to be used in the formulation of new signage project working with Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc.

LR Damage Assessment Team Russell Reardon and Alicia Stevenson conducted a preliminary assessment/inspection of the seagrass grounding 'Antigone' in NW ship channel. The foreign national owned 11m sailing vessel was hard aground for several days before he was eventually towed off late on 15 April.

Coral Reef Classroom opened its spring season last week on two brilliantly sunny days in Key West. A staple of the FKNMS education plan, the program annually offers local middle school students a chance to better understand the unique ecosystem that surrounds their home. Students from Horace O'Bryant Middle School enjoyed snorkeling at local reefs and learned how to measure and record water quality data such as temperature, salinity, and dissolved oxygen. Six field trips out of Key West, six from Key Largo, and one from Marathon are planned for April and May.

On April 22, Education Specialist Ivy Kelley will brief the Audubon education team about the FKNMS, the coral reef ecosystem, and details about some of its inhabitants. Each year, the sanctuary helps prepare team members for their duties as marine educators for Audubon summer programs in the Florida Keys.

Ivy Kelley has also been busy visiting schools for the classroom prep element of Coral Reef Classroom. Kady Elkins, who used to work for the FKNMS and helped pioneer the program in the early '90s, serves as an instructor for CRC in Key West when she is not in class for nursing school.

On April 24, Ivy will visit Plantation Key School to introduce the sanctuary's new Award Yourself Mini-Awards program. Local teachers will learn how to create proposals in order to compete for up to \$100 each (\$4,000 total) for classroom materials and supplies. The mini-awards were made possible by funding from the Sanctuary Friends of the Florida Keys, and are concurrent with the larger-dollar Award Yourself program. Award Yourself (formerly known as Teacher Grants) funding has been used over the past seven years by Florida Keys teachers to provide field trips, purchase equipment, books, and otherwise enhance their regular curricula.

On 04/14/03, BG and Dave Score conducted an assessment of a vessel grounding on the rubble zone area of Conch Reef. The 85' commercial shrimping vessel Capt HH III had

run hard aground the day before and was removed by local towing and salvage operators. A full report with video documentation of the injury is in production.

On 04/17/03, Sanctuary Restoration Biologist Harold Hudson, Resource Manager Bill Goodwin, and Reef Medics Volunteer Jeff Anderson conducted primary restoration activities at the African Sojourner site, a coral reef injury resulting from the grounding of a sailboat at Carysfort reef. Eleven large, viable branches of elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*) were reattached to suitable substrate, for a total of approximately 2m<sup>2</sup> of living coral tissue receiving restabilization treatment.

On 04/18/03, Bill Goodwin was escorted out to Conch Reef by FWC Lt. David Roudebush and Officer Elizabeth Riesz to conduct an injury assessment on a vessel grounding that had occurred the previous evening within the rubble zone area. The injury consisted of an "L"-shaped feature displaying twin parallel propeller marks. The prop dredging resulted in the superficial tilling of loose coral reef rubble to a depth of about 15 cm. A full report with video documentation will be produced shortly.

An eighty-five foot steel hull shrimp vessel ran aground in the rubble area of Conch Reef after the captain of the vessel turned the helm over to a crew member. Lieutenant Ed Maldonado was on water patrol and was surprised to see the vessel so close to shore and on a dangerous course. He raced out to try to re-direct the vessel but arrived on scene just as the vessel ran aground. Officers Liz Riesz, Scott LaRosa, and Rewa Maldonado, all members of the Sanctuary Enforcement Team, arrived on scene to assess the grounding. The officers allowed another shrimp vessel in the area to pull the grounded vessel off at high tide. The captain/owner of the vessel was issued a federal citation for the grounding and a biological assessment is pending.

Officer David Dipre responded to the grounding of a forty foot steel hull sailing vessel at Calda Bank. The vessel grounded after losing power to its engine and drifted onto the bank causing a one hundred foot scar in the seagrass. The vessel is still aground and it is anticipated that there will be further visible damage once the vessel is removed. A grounding assessment will be scheduled for the area and Federal charges are likely to be filed by Officer Dipre.

The FWC patrol vessel "ORION" was patrolling the Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary north of the Marquesas and made several significant resource cases. One of the cases involved the seizure of more than fifty thousand pounds of shrimp. All of the cases are still under investigation as of this report and further details will be forthcoming.

The Department of Environmental Protection Memorandum of Agreement has been signed by all parties and is in effect for FY03. The Memorandum of Agreement with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is working its way through the Dept. of Commerce clearance process and is expected to be signed very soon.

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS/AWARDS:**

Upper Keys Volunteer, Loretta Lawrence was chosen as a 2003 Environmental Hero. She will receive her award at the June meeting of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council.

## **COMMUNITY EVENTS:**

Lower Region Team OCEAN coordinator John Nazzaro presented "Things you need to know when boating in the FKNMS" to safe boater classes held by USCG Auxillary and US Power Squadron last week. The presentations lasted about 45 minutes and reached 25 new boaters at the USCGA class and 35 boaters at the Power Squadron.

Lower Region Team OCEAN coordinator John Nazzaro also participated in the Stanely Switlick School Career Day on 17 April. The event allowed John to talk to 4 groups (15 students each) of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about the importance of the marine environment and careers that are related to it.

On Friday, April 19 the FKNMS sponsored a booth at the REEF Fish Count Challenge Awards BBQ in Key Largo. REEF organized the competition fish counting event with 5 dive shops in the Upper Keys and Divers Direct retail store.

FKNMS hosted a booth on Saturday, April 20 at the Cheeca Lodge Earth Day event. This annual event is the largest Earth Day event in the Upper Keys. Visitors to the booth were able to pick up Sanctuary information and make buttons. The event was also a fund raising event for the non-profit Save-A-Turtle organization and their support of sea turtle papaloma research.

Officer David Dipre of the Sanctuary Enforcement Team participated in the annual youth festival held at the Key West Naval Base. Officer Dipre provided information about the Commission and it's role in protecting the resources and people of Florida. Also discussed were boating safety, environmental preservation, and Sanctuary enforcement issues and philosophies.

## **CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

Nothing to report.

## **PRESS – MEDIA ISSUES:**

The media has been all over the whale stranding issue in the past several days. Jayson Horadam gave an interview to Miami's channel 7 news on Friday reference the whale stranding. He also gave a phone interview to BBC on Saturday night reference same.